



Testimony in Support of S.B 284, AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS.

Dear Chairs Abercrombie and Moore, Vice Chairs Lesser and Leeper, Ranking Members Berthel and Case, and Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Ted Shepherd and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **S.B. 284 - An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status**. This bill would provide state-funded medical assistance to any child or young adult under the age of eighteen years of age, regardless of immigration status, whose household income does not exceed two hundred one percent of the federal poverty level, and who does not otherwise qualify for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance 11 Program, or employer-sponsored insurance.

Connecticut's expansion of HUSKY last year to children ages 0-8 years was an important win for immigrants in the state, who have been predominantly challenged by the shortage of healthcare resources available to them. The passage of S.B 284 would expand this win by guaranteeing more access to programs like HUSKY that largely benefit low-income immigrant families and individuals. Undocumented immigrants without coverage must rely on health care safety net resources, such as public hospitals or community clinics, to access needed medical care. Despite serving as important access points, none of these resources is equivalent to having comprehensive health insurance coverage.

Undocumented immigrants in our state pay roughly 145 million dollars into state and local taxes every year, 253 million into federal taxes, out of that 54.6 million goes into medicare and 207.4 million goes into social security according to a study conducted by the New American Economy. Undocumented taxpayers are contributing to the state's health programs, but their status makes them ineligible to access said state health programs. Currently, the federal government pays between 50% and 90% of the cost for health care services provided to eligible Medicaid enrollees in the form of reimbursements to the state, individual providers and health facilities. Advocates for immigrants argue that many undocumented residents pay both state and federal taxes, which help fund programs like HUSKY Health, and they should therefore have access to coverage.

Connecticut's undocumented immigrant population has recounted stories of being turned away for lifesaving treatments and preventive services, encountering discrimination and racism while seeking health care, and fear of being arrested while trying to get help. This is highly unjust given that they pay millions of dollars in local and state taxes every year to fund the health coverage programs that they're excluded from. The Affordable Care Act made huge strides in increasing access to health insurance, but it excluded undocumented immigrants from its programs. Undocumented individuals in our state are effectively cut off from access to reliable health care. HUSKY, Connecticut's Medicaid program, provides a safety net by offering health insurance to most low-income residents, but it currently excludes undocumented immigrants and green card holders who have been in the country for less than five years. Initial job losses amid the pandemic were particularly high among immigrants. Given their low incomes, job loss could lead to significant financial pressures and increase the share of those who are uninsured, as people lose access to employer-sponsored insurance or are no longer able to afford coverage. If we want healthy kids, the best way to achieve that is to have healthy parents—but currently, we're leaving undocumented parents behind. Children do better when their parents do better. It has been proven that when parents and caregivers have access to health care, their children are more likely to be insured and to use and receive care.

In conclusion, I urge you to expand healthcare to the immigrant population because it would allow them to receive the preventative treatment they deserve, reduce the uninsured rate in Connecticut, and save the state money by decreasing uncompensated care costs. Connecticut can and should do better in promoting healthcare as a human right, rather than a commodity that only the wealthy can afford. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Human Services Committee so that more immigrants in the state are able to access and afford health care that they're in desperate need of.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Ted Shepherd
New Haven, CT